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ABSTRACT

The results of a retention intervention study designed to provide a one-to-one supportive relationship for incoming black male students at the University of Maryland are discussed. In this study, 34 full-time first-time American black male freshmen were matched with interested members of the Kappa Alpha Psi black alumni fraternity (a community-based group interested in special services). Each participating alumnus made contact with his assigned student once a month through the academic year. The treatment group was compared with a nontreatment control group on the outcome variables of academic persistence and persistence in good standing. Though there was a lot of enthusiasm expressed by participants in the study, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups on either outcome variable, suggesting that a successful mentoring program may need to involve adult members in closer contact with the university community or at least familiar with its progress, environment, and personnel. Possibly, the impact of the intervention will show itself not in retention rates but in career identification, a variable not included in this study. Future studies might identify members of a social group whose skills and interests entail direct involvement with college students. This would allow for group interactions with a small cluster of college students and the direct referral to other group members with specific skills and specialties. Contains nine references.(SM)

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A Fraternity-based Retention Intervention for Black Male Freshmen

Research Report #02-89

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

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Stanley Hunt, Thomas Magoon, Brian McLaren

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The University of Maryland

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Summary

The aim of this retention intervention was to provide a one-to-one supportive relationship for incoming black students. Thirty-four fulltime firsttime black male freshmen with American citizenship were matched with interested members of Kappa Alpha Psi, a community-based black alumni fraternity interested in special service programming. Each participating Kappa alumnus agreed to make contact with their assigned student once a month throughout the academic year. The content of the contacts was up to the participants. Kappa alumni were supplied with material concerning the academic calendar and student support services at UMCP.

The treatment group was compared with a nontreatment comparison group on two outcome variables: academic persistence, and persistence in good standing. While there was a lot of enthusiasm expressed by participants in the study, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups on either outcome variable, which suggests that a successful mentoring program may need to involve adult members in closer contact with the university community, or at least familiar with its programs, environment, and personnel.

* Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Thomas Magoon, Brian McLaren

A Fraternity-based Retention Intervention for Black Male Freshmen

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group
The University of Maryland College Park

Federal and private sector support of black student education, beginning in the early 1960's, resulted in a marked shift of black students from traditionally black colleges and universities to predominantly white institutions (Williams, Gooden, Ewers, Daniels & Brewington, 1983). However, retention rates for black students enrolled in predominantly white institutions of higher education are significantly lower than those of their white counterparts. For example, a study comparing white university students with black university students at six predominantly white border or southern university campuses (Nettles, Gosman, Thoeny, & Dandridge, 1985) showed that black students tend to have higher annual and five-year attrition rates than white students. Furthermore, although approximately 70% of all black college students are enrolled in predominantly white institutions, historically black colleges and universities award more than half of all black bachelor degrees (Braddock, 1981).

Academic factors are typically correlated with attrition rates for all students (Pantages & Creedon, 1978). Yet there is increasing evidence that cognitive variables as predictors of academic success are more questionable for black males than for white students or black females. Researchers (Farver, Sedlacek, & Brooks, 1974) have shown significant positive correlations between SAT scores and first year college grades for white

students and for black females, but not for black males.

Other socio-psychological factors have been found to play significant roles in black students' attrition. Tinto's (1975) investigation led to his conclusion that race is a predictor of college attrition quite independent of measured cognitive ability. Suen (1983) found a significantly high correlation between high scores on a MEANINGLESSNESS scale (defined as a sense of loss of direction as to one's purpose and meaning in a university) and attrition.

In an effort to examine factors associated with college retention among black male freshmen, while at the same time both emphasizing the importance of a college education to one's personal and career development and offering support and encouragement during the first year at college, the Counseling Center Retention Study Group (RSG) designed a small scale study in concert with the Kappa Alpha Psi (Kappa), a community-based black fraternity interested in special service programming. The aim of the intervention was to provide a one-to-one supportive relationship for a sample of black male freshmen. Among the attributes that made alumni fraternity members ideal for this intervention were the following: (a) all members of this fraternity were college/university graduates, and as such they already possessed the primary goal sought by entering freshmen; (b) fraternity members' careers and social service orientation made it possible to form dyad relationships with freshmen based on students' career goals and/or leisure interests; (c) in view of the fact that the literature indicates that a significant number of black youth grow up in female-dominated homes, the

availability of an adult male in an informal mentoring role was seen as an added advantage for students who may spend their formative years in such settings; (d) alumni fraternity members represent a stability that is usually not achieved when first year students are paired with more advanced students who may themselves leave school before graduating and in so doing demonstrate the behavior that the retention intervention was designed to prevent; and (e) in light of recent research documenting the significance of noncognitive factors in the retention of black students (Sedlacek, 1987), the use of alumni fraternity members who would act as listeners, sounding boards, role models, etc., seemed particularly appropriate.

METHOD

In October 1985 a listing was drawn of fulltime, first time black male freshmen with U.S. citizenship, from which ninety names were randomly selected to serve as potential subjects in the retention intervention. They were sent an invitational letter from the Retention Study Group. The letter observed that one's experience at a university is most likely to be very different from one's previous educational experiences, and described the program with the Kappa fraternity alumni members as being a way of helping students overcome some of the challenges and issues with which they are apt to be confronted during his first year. The letter informed the students of the likelihood of a followup phone call to answer questions and determine their interest in participating in the described program.

During October, followup phone calls were made to students

until there were enough interested students to match, one-to-one according to career interest, hobby, or geographical commonality, with interested Kappa alumni (n = 34).

During the first week of November each participating student received a letter from the Retention Study Group with the name and professional pursuit and/or leisure time interest of the Kappa alumnus assigned to him. The letter suggested that the student anticipate being contacted by the alumnus during early November. Included with the letter were a list of the possible roles the Kappa alumnus might take to help the student in his first year of college, a one page description of how to take objective tests, and a list of ten academic survival tips.

Each participating Kappa alumnus received a packet in the mail the first week of November. The packet included a letter with the name, phone number, and major of the student assigned to him, the optimal time to reach the student by phone - ascertained during the preliminary phone call to the student determining his interest in participating in the program. It also contained a calendar of dates for the various phases of the program, a Resource Manual of the University of Maryland's student support services and programs, and a list of the names and phone numbers of the Retention Study Group members.

The program was designed to begin the first week of November, with weekly meetings through spring break (mid-March 1986). Two additional contacts were scheduled, one in early May and one mid-June. The content of the meetings was up to the participants.

Forty-four additional students were randomly selected to

constitute a nontreatment control group.

Outcome Variables

There were two outcome variables studied to determine the effect of the intervention on subjects' retention rates:

(1) academic persistence, defined as being enrolled for a given semester;

(2) academic persistence in good standing, defined as enrolled for a given semester and with no academic action taken as a result of that semester.

All data concerning registration status and academic action were obtained from University records. Data were analyzed for four semesters subsequent to the semester of intervention.

Outcome variables for the treatment group were compared with those of the nontreatment control group for four semesters subsequent to the semester of intevervention.

RESULTS

There were no differences between the treatment group and the nontreatment control group on academic persistence, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.

Academic Persistence by Group
(in percent)

	Group		
	Treatment	Control	
Initial n	34	44	
Semester	%	%	p
Fall '86	71	68	ns
Spring '87	68	64	ns
Fall '87	68	64	ns
Spring '88	65	61	ns

There were no statistically significant differences between the treatment group and the control group on the rates of those who persisted in good standing, as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2.
Academic Persistence in Good Standing by Group
(in percent)

	Group		
	Treatment	Control	
Semester	%	%	p
Fall '86	35	41	ns
Spring '87	38	46	ns
Fall '87	53	50	ns
Spring '88	53	48	ns

DISCUSSION

The results of the retention intervention were disappointing. While there was a great deal of enthusiasm expressed by both Kappa alumni and the black male freshmen participants, an examination of the outcome variables showed that the students participating in the fraternity-based retention intervention were not significantly different from the nontreatment control group in their performance over the period of the study.

Perhaps for a mentoring relationship to serve as an effective retention intervention, the mentor needs to be affiliated with the campus or at least be familiar with its programs, environment and personnel, either by being a fraternity alumnus of the subjects' university or by being a fraternity alumnus from elsewhere but currently employed by the subjects' university.

It is possible that the impact of the intervention will show not in retention rates but in career identity, a variable not included in the present study.

Additional rigor needs to be applied to the definition of mentoring and the actual structuring of interventions of this nature. Variation in the strength of the pairings may have been a factor contributing to general nonsignificance, since some pairings functioned as designed, and others did not.

Future studies of this nature might identify members of a social group whose skills and interests entail direct involvement with college students. This design would allow for group interactions with a small cluster of college students and the direct referral to other group members with specific skills and specialties. The small group formation would constitute the major experimental variable, eliminating the unlikely probability that thirty members of one particular alumni fraternity might have equal skills in relating to thirty diverse undergraduate students.

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